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Mind Body Phone

by

Emilie St.Hilaire

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

in

Drawing and Intermedia

Department of Art & Design

University of Alberta

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List of Videos

File name: Screening.mp4

Video duration: 2m0s

Title of work: Screening

Date: 2013-2014

Materials: MDF constructed walls, continuous video projection, digital print, fabric, black paper

Wall dimensions: 9x14'

Window opening dimensions:

Digital print dimensions: 27x40"

File name: PhoneLight.mp4

Video duration: 1m14s

Title of work: Phone Light

Date: 2013 - 2014

Materials: Digital print and colour changing LED light bulb

Dimensions: 30x48"

File name: Prana.mp4

Video duration: 0m59s

Title of work: Prana

Materials: Continuous video projection, acrylic glass, PVC board, Arduino micro-computer, electrical components, fan

Dimensions: 4x8'

File name: LED-F.mp4

Video duration: 0m59s

Title of work: LED-F

Date: 2014

Materials: Oak frame, 145 flickering LED tea lights, frosted acrylic glass, PVC board, electrical components

Dimensions: 27x45"

File name: iOSMeditation.mp4

Video duration: 5m22s

Title of work: iOS Meditation

Date: 2014

Materials: Continuous video projection, black paper, pillows, black fabric

Dimensions: Variable (room size 14x15')

Mind Body Phone

Mind Body Phone consists of video and installation works, presented in a darkened gallery space, which emit light through projection and LED light installations. This work offers quiet spaces in which viewers encounter screens and images of technology in unexpected ways. This statement addresses and contextualizes the show's three central themes: spirituality, the virtual, and time.

Introduction

Societies often instrumentalise technologies to accomplish tasks quickly and effectively, and overlook their forms and characteristics (outside of the pragmatic) in the process. The history of one such technology — artificial light — goes back several millennia through religious, scientific, commercial and cultural practices; the ways that such forms of light shape both viewers and what is being viewed is worth considering. *Mind Body Phone* investigates these forms of viewership in a contemporary and art historical context, with regard for the physical body and the mind.

Spirituality

This body of work stemmed from my interest in comparing two kinds of embodied practices: the physical postures and meditative exercises present in all main schools of yoga and several religions; and the rise of social media and digital devices. Both practices have tangible effects on the mind and body, but where the first is undertaken to improve health and well-being, the second acts to improve productivity and connectivity, and to provide entertainment. Both practices involve specific gestures and physical positions, both involve new qualities and forms of light, and both affect mental awareness, either heightening or lessening it. These two practices are rarely examined together for their similarities, especially the ways that both draw upon forms of ritual and fetishization. I'm particularly interested in the inadvertently ritualistic aspects of daily practices with technology, and how these contrast with the deliberate ritual of traditional meditative practices. The habitual connection with a mobile digital device that commands attention and results in physical, mental, and affective reactions (in response to a ring or vibration, or the absence thereof) stands in opposition to meditative practices, which aim to eliminate superfluous thoughts and actions.

The dark gallery space of *Mind Body Phone* allows the light of each work to become present against the emptiness of the surrounding darkness. The brief moments between light and dark are highlighted through many instances of flickering light, as well as in "LED - S" which emulates a twilight sky. The focus on light and dark references life and death, a key topic of contemplation in meditation and pranayama (yogic breathing exercises). A full inhale represents life and the bottom of an exhale represents death. This imagery is referenced in "Prana" which uses a fan to push air into the gallery space in front of a recording of a flame

wavering in sync with the breeze. The extinguishing of a flame is symbolic of the extinction of life, the virtual flame featured in this work never goes out.

The virtual


"Prana," "Phone light," and "Sceening" present an illusive connection between virtual and physical worlds. These works highlight the magical qualities attributed to digital devices, qualities fostered in part by effective marketing campaigns, along with the difficulty of end users in understanding technological black boxes that can create a reverence for the glowing, artifact. In "Prana" the illusion is transparent — the fan is not causing the flame in the video to flicker — yet because of the timing it's easy and delightful to imagine the physical and virtual interacting. There is a willingness to believe in this connection that transcends understanding and highlights a desire to see more than what is present in the work's parts. This tendency is similar to the suspension of disbelief employed by traditional media but the boundary between viewings and real-time visual life has become permeable as the media now clings to the body, always within reach, becoming an ever-present part of real-time visual life.

"iOS Meditation" presents an exercise in mindfulness while being exposed to an Apple iPhone 5c commercial playing on an iPhone. The content is not watched or heard but is brought into the physical space where it meets the body in the form of light. Light is the medium of the digital age, ever-present yet invisible.

Time

Mobile devices have made online media accessible in more places than ever and have resulted in an increased demand for media, quickly and from almost everywhere. Multitasking is considered an increasingly common habit, with the possibility of doing more in every moment resulting in less awareness of what is happening in the space surrounding a mobile screen. *Mind Body Phone* is engineered to slow viewers down through architectural considerations and other elements (such as lighting and audio) that create quiet spaces that feel outside of the everyday. An illuminated screen may be ubiquitous but in reconsidering the screen as a light source rather than a source of images or text, there is no longer a need to consume the content and the form itself can be considered instead.

"iOS Meditation," for example, plays in a very dark room with a double-curtained entrance. Viewers are invited to take a white cushion into the space to sit on the floor. Inside, viewers' eyes accustom to the dark room and they see a video composed of phone light. Ideally this experience presents the phone in a mode that contrasts our usual engagements with it, and upon exiting the space the differences between the pitch-black room, the gallery, and the outside world are be emphasized.



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Screening (installation detail), 2013 - 2014, MDF constructed walls, continuous video projection, digital print, fabric, black paper. Dimensions: variable (room size 14'x9'x9') (Digital print size 27"x40").



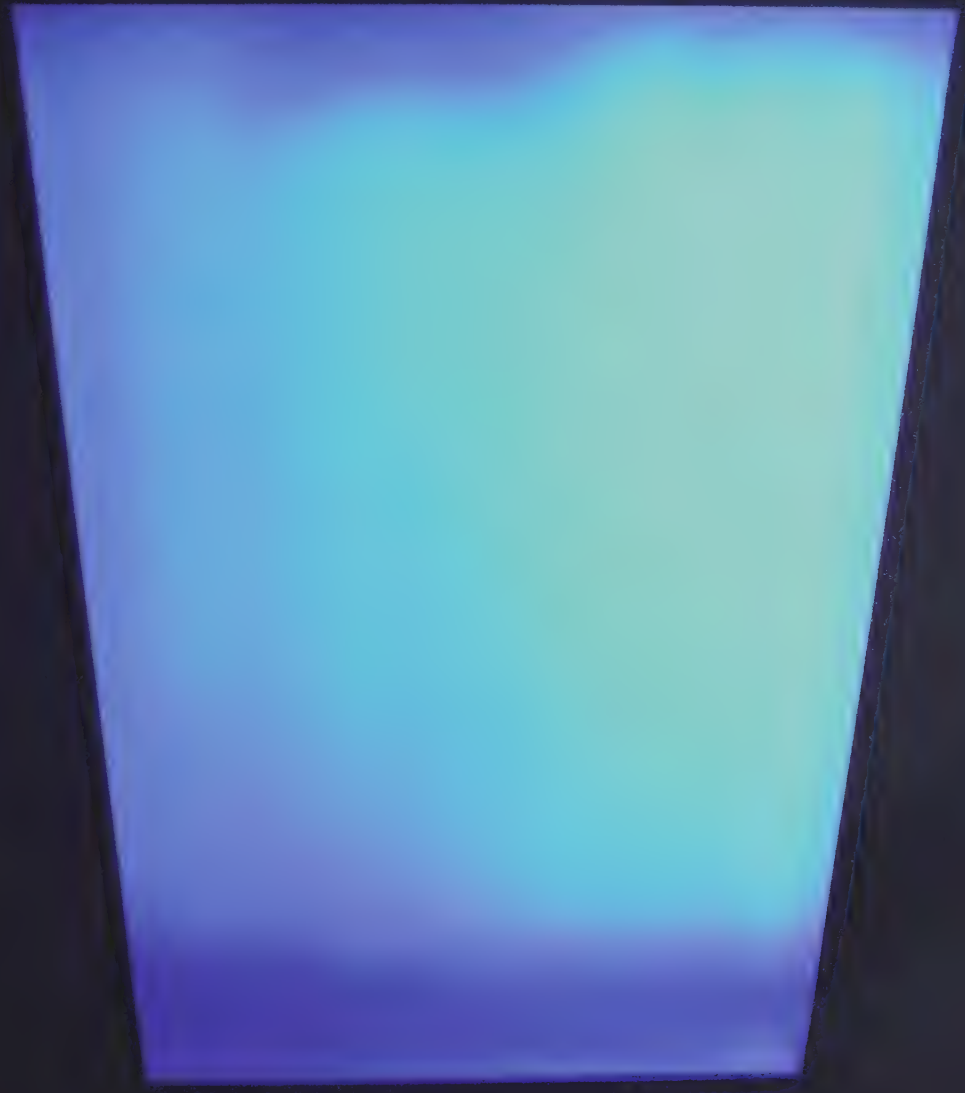
Screening (installation view), 2013 - 2014, MDF constructed walls, continuous video projection, digital print, fabric, black paper. Dimensions: variable (room size 14'x9'x9') (Digital print size 27"x40").



Phone Light (installation detail), 2013 - 2014, Digital print and colour changing LED light bulb. Print dimensions: 30x48".



Phone Light (installation view), 2013 - 2014, Digital print and colour changing LED light bulb. Print dimensions: 30x48".



LED-S (installation detail), 2014, Oak frame, strip of 600 LED lights, frosted acrylic glass, electrical components.
Dimensions: 27" x 45" x 6".



LED-S (installation view), 2014, Oak frame, strip of 600 LED lights, frosted acrylic glass, electrical components.
Dimensions: 27" x 45" x 6".



Prana (installation detail), 2014, Continuous video projection, acrylic glass, PVC board, Arduino micro-computer, electrical components, fan. Dimensions: variable (frontal area: 4' x 8').



Prana (installation view), 2014, Continuous video projection, acrylic glass, PVC board, Arduino micro-computer, electrical components, fan. Dimensions: variable (frontal area: 4'x 8').



LED-F (installation view), 2014, Oak frame, 145 flickering LED tea lights, frosted acrylic glass, PVC board, electrical components. Dimensions: 27" x 45" x 6".



LED-F (installation detail), 2014, Oak frame, 145 flickering LED tea lights, frosted acrylic glass, PVC board, electrical components. Dimensions: 27"x 45"x 6".



iOS Meditation (exterior installation view), 2014, continuous video projection, black paper, pillows, black fabric ceiling, curtain. Dimensions variable (room size 14'x15'x9').



iOS Meditation (interior installation view), 2014, continuous video projection, black paper, pillows, black fabric ceiling, curtain. Dimensions variable (room size 14'x15'x9').



Mind Body Phone title wall sign, 2014, CNC cut PVC board, strip LED lights, electrical components. Dimensions: 48" x 36".

LED-S

Oak wood frame, strip of 600 LED lights, frosted acrylic glass

27x45"

2014

Illuminated screens are ubiquitous but in reconsidering the screen as a light source rather than a source of images or text, the form itself can be observed. How can the essence of something be communicated without text and images?

Mind Body Phone LED-S text box, 2014, wood frame, glass, printed acetate, 3V LED lights and batteries.
Dimensions: 9"x 9"x 2".

Introduction

Work stems from my interest in comparing embodied practices, the physical postures and motions; and the use of social media and digital tools; practices have tangible effects on the mind. The first is undertaken to improve posture, breathing, and to provide entertainment, both through the gestures and physical postures, about the light, and affect mental phenomena. Each work illustrates these interactions.

Mind Body Phone artist statement text box, 2014, wood frame, glass, printed acetate, 3V LED lights and batteries.
Dimensions: 9"x 9"x 2".



Mind Body Phone exterior title sign, 2014, CNC cut PVC board, strip LED lights, electrical components.
Dimensions: 48"x 36".

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Education

Master of Fine Arts Candidate, University of Alberta, 2012 - 2014
Bachelor of Fine Arts Honours, University of Manitoba, 2010

Scholarships

2014 Canada Council for the Arts Inter-arts office, travel grant for professional development, \$700.
2014 Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, University of Alberta, Profiling Alberta's Graduate Students Award, \$1,100.
2013 Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Graduate Student Award, \$7,800.
2012 and 2013 MFA/MDes Graduate Student Scholarship, University of Alberta, \$15,000.
2009, 2012, 2013 Francofonds, bourse d'études, various amounts \$200 - \$500.
2001 Chown Centennial Entrance Scholarship, University of Manitoba, \$500.

Solo Exhibitions

November 2014 *Mind Body Phone*, FAB Gallery, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta.
January 2014 *Déjà vous*, Harcourt House Gallery, Edmonton, Alberta

Group Exhibitions

July 2014 *Record of Events*, Harcourt House Gallery, Edmonton, Alberta
June 2014 *The Sound Garden*, Nextfest Edmonton, Studio Bloom, Edmonton, Alberta
October 2013 *Prismatika*, Steppes Gallery, Edmonton, Alberta
September 2013 *Blood, Sweat, Glory*, Official Selection, Toronto Urban Film Festival, Toronto, Ontario
June 2013 *Pier to Pier*, Philosopher's Knoll Gallery, The Banff Centre, Banff, Alberta
May 2013 *Encoding Identities*, DC3 Gallery, Edmonton, Alberta
April 2013 *Degradation*, Gateway Artists, Enterprise Square Community Gallery, Edmonton, Alberta
August 2012 *Gesamkunstverkt*, The Edge Gallery, Winnipeg, Manitoba
Sept 2011 *Pamilya - Paul Robles and His Friends*, Semai Gallery, Winnipeg, Manitoba
Aug 2011 *Summer Institute Exhibition*, Plug In Institute of Contemporary Art, Winnipeg, Manitoba
April 2011 *Art at the Castle III*, Watler House, Pedro's Castle, Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands
May 2010 *Coming Out*, AceArtInc., Winnipeg, Manitoba
April 2010 *Red White Hot*, Outworks Gallery, Winnipeg, Manitoba
April 2010 *Thesis Exhibition*, Curated by Robert Epp, Gallery 1.1.1., Winnipeg, Manitoba
April 2010 *These Theses*, Outworks Gallery, Winnipeg, Manitoba
April 2010 *YOP Printmaking Exhibition*, Martha Street Studio, Winnipeg, Manitoba

2009 *Enc'art*, La maison des artistes, Winnipeg, Manitoba
2008, 2009 *Womyn's Art Show*, Curated by Zoe Blount, Al Ebanks Studio, Cayman Islands
2006 *Braided Grass Land*, Winnipeg Folk Festival Prairie Exhibition, Birds Hill Park, Manitoba
2005 *Isn't there something on tonight?* Ace Art Inc. & Urban Shaman galleries, Winnipeg, Manitoba
2004 *La relève*, La maison des artistes, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Academic presentations

2014 Department of Art and Design Fall Artist Talk Series, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB
2014 The creation of iGiselle colloquium presentation, University of Alberta, Edmonton.
2014 iGiselle: an interactive ballet-based video game, Grace Hopper Celebration of Women in Computing, Phoenix, Arizona.

Academic Experience

2014 Research assistant, Kule Institute for Advanced Study, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta.
2013 and 2014 Drawing and intermedia primary instructor, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta.
2012 - 2014 Teaching assistant, lab supervisor and lab assistant, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta.

Residencies

2013 *Banff Research in Culture "Dock-ing, New Economies of Exchange*, The Banff Centre, Alberta
2011 *Summer Institute*, Plug In Institute of Contemporary Art, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Art Reviews

Doug Johnson, *Artist Paints Self-Portrait in ...*, The Edmonton Examiner, Jan _ 2014
Fish Griwkowsky, *Long Live the New Flesh*, Edmonton Journal Blog, May 16, 2013
Sandee Moore, *We are Family(a)*, Uptown, Sept 29, 2011
Paul Ruban, *Au bal des débutantes*, incl. photo, La Liberté, June 2, 2010

Art Publications

2014 *Arts XL Edmonton Arts and Culture Newspaper*, with Sarah French, Harcourt House artist in residence, Edmonton, Alberta
2012 - 2013 *Comic arts by the Emiliest*, The Gateway student newspaper, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta
2009 *Sillons - hommage à Gabrielle Roy*, Éditions du Blé, ISBN 978-2-923673-09-7
2008 *Le soleil est la première machine*, Éditions du Blé, ISBN 978-2-923673-01-1

Volunteer Work

2012 - 2014 Art and Design Graduate Students Association, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta
2011 Board Member, Visual Arts Society, Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands
2005 - 2009 Photography and design work, Little Travellers Initiative, Winnipeg, Manitoba

2006 Judge, Manitoba Provincial Lifeguard Competition, Winnipeg, Manitoba
2005 Parks and Recreation, album artwork design for Conifera records CD, Winnipeg, Manitoba
2005 Painting workshop for students, *Rif Raf* assembly (DSFM school division) Winnipeg, Manitoba
2005 Young Artists Program, Painting & public media workshop, Winnipeg Folk Festival, Manitoba
2005 Poll clerk, Elections Canada, Winnipeg, Manitoba
2004 – 2006 Helpline Volunteer, Teen Touch, Winnipeg, Manitoba
2004 Volunteer (various work), Ace Art Inc. artist run center, Winnipeg, Manitoba
2003 – 2004 School of Art Student Council, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Other Work Experience

2011 Gallery assistant, Opera Gallery, Singapore, South East Asia
2011 Photography instructor, Visual Arts Society, Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands
2010 Photography instructor, Henry's School of Imaging, Winnipeg, Manitoba
2009 Assistant store manager, All Fired Up Pottery and Mosaic Studio, Grand Cayman
2008 Picture framer & photo lab manager, Picture This, Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands
2007 Technical Support (for photo labs), Noritsu Canada, Montreal, Quebec
2007 English teacher, Jeju Island English Camp, Jeju-do Island, South Korea
2006 Photo lab technician, London Drugs, Winnipeg, Manitoba
2005 – 2006 Colour analyser, Jostens/Lifetouch, Winnipeg, Manitoba
2005 Photo lab technician and customer service, Black's Photo, Calgary & Winnipeg
2001 – 2004 Lifeguard and swimming instructor, Boni-vital Pool and YM-YWCA, Winnipeg, Manitoba

